Streamlining and Strengthening the Accreditation Process
Accreditation Process and Automation Overview

Background

The Professional Services Division (PSD) of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) is responsible for accrediting Educator Preparation Programs (EPP). Accreditation ensures that organizations administering EPPs (Program Sponsors) are doing so in accordance with established educational standards and practices. The accreditation process comprises a seven-year cycle of activities during which Program Sponsors submit annual reports of their programs' status and development activities, PSD staff review and evaluate those reports, site visits are conducted by PSD, and accreditation recommendations are rendered.

The reporting and review portions of the accreditation cycle have considered such things as the EPP's description, the organizational structure of the Program Sponsor; qualifications of faculty and staff; details of program course work, fieldwork, and clinical practice. Much of the information collected during the reporting phases of the cycle was in the form of qualitative narrative. That is, relatively lengthy descriptions of how a program is structured and implemented. These descriptions were reviewed by subject matter experts who are qualified volunteer peer reviewers.

Recently, CTC has undertaken to "Streamline and Strengthen the Accreditation Process". This effort is referred to as the "SSAP Project." SSAP signals a shift of focus for the accreditation process from simply ensuring compliance with established standards to evaluating the effectiveness of those standards by measuring program outcomes. SSAP seeks to expand the collection and analysis of program-related information by standardizing the reporting requirements and leveraging data storage and retrieval technologies and system automation where possible.

CTC's vision for the project includes a restricted public facing user interface through which Program Sponsors may deliver their annual reports and retrieve reports and summaries of their programs' features and accreditation status. The restricted public facing interface may also be used as a means of communicating with sponsor stakeholders over the course of the accreditation cycle. Access to a given Program Sponsor's detailed data and reporting portal would be restricted to authorized staff of the Program Sponsor, and would be controlled by secure authentication. A separate portal accessible to the general public would present aggregated statistics and general information derived from the results of the accreditation process, though not necessarily from data related to work in progress.

In addition to the public facing user interfaces, a separate internal user interface would allow PSD accreditation staff and authorized volunteer reviewers to retrieve and review the reports submitted by Program Sponsors and enter the results of their reviews of the submitted documentation. PSD staff would have full access to all information submitted, and volunteer staff would have access only to the information submitted by the Program Sponsors whose reports they are reviewing.

The following sections describe in more detail the accreditation cycle, and suggest areas where an automated data system might be useful in the management and administration of accreditation processes.

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Business Cycle/Processes

Cohorts

Each Program Sponsor is assigned to one of seven cohorts. The members of each cohort are subject to the activities of a specific stage of the seven-year accreditation cycle, and progress through the phases of the cycle as a group.

The accreditation data system must manage cohorts and their members, including internal and external contact management and the scheduling of accreditation cycle events and activities, and the assignment of accreditation team members.

Initial Program Review

Program Sponsors submit for approval documentation regarding proposed programs. These submissions are reviewed and evaluated, and revised and resubmitted if necessary, until the review team finds the proposal meets the Commission's standards. If the review team determines that additional narrative or documentation are required, the Program Sponsor will be able to provide it prior to the approval. Once a program is approved, it joins the seven year accreditation cycle.

Annual Reporting and Analysis (Each Year of the Cycle)

Program Sponsors are required to report annually on candidate and program data, including demographic data and summaries of program evaluation and improvement activities. Annual reporting consists of Program Sponsors' submitting data about the program. The Program Sponsors' reports are reviewed by PSD staff, who will help to identify areas in need of improvement. Subsequent reporting will include status updates related to remediation efforts.

The accreditation data system should provide a structured consistent interface through which Program Sponsors may enter and/or upload information and prepared documents. Where practical, data inputs should be constrained to pre-defined sets of choices so that the data collected may be standardized, allowing meaningful comparisons of data and statistics across and between Program Sponsors.

Preconditions Review (Years One and Four of the Cycle)

Program preconditions are grounded in statute, regulations and/or CTC policy for each approved program. Program Sponsors must provide evidence of compliance with each precondition relevant to the programs for which they are approved.

The accreditation data system should provide for the maintenance of definitions of preconditions by program, and should allow the results of CTC reviews and recommendations to be entered in a structured and quantifiable way, where possible.

Program Review (Year Five of the Cycle)

Program Submission Review

Program documentation submitted during year 5 includes the following:

- Program description

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- Organizational Structure
- Faculty and Staff Qualifications, Including Syllabi and Courses Taught
- Course Offerings and Sequences
- Competencies Addressed by Coursework
- Program Fieldwork and Clinical Practice Descriptions
- Candidate Competency Monitoring and Evaluation Methods

Common Standards Review

Common Standards address aspects of program quality that are common across all EPPs for a Program Sponsor. Included here are such things as the sponsor's vision for educator preparation within the organization, the distribution of resources across different programs, faculty quality, and admissions and advising procedures. Program Sponsors provide documentation responding to each Common Standard, including information about specific programs where necessary.

Program Standards address the quality of program features that are specific to a credential. These include assessments, curriculum, field experiences, and knowledge and skills demonstrated by candidates in the specific credential areas. When initially proposing a program for accreditation, the Program Sponsor must specify one of three standards against which the program will be evaluated, as follows:

Option 1, California Program Standards.

Option 2, National or Professional Program Standards.

Option 3, Experimental Program Standards.

For the lifetime of the program, it will be evaluated against the standard used when the program was approved. The nature of the annual reporting for the program will be driven by the standard option upon which the program is based.

The accreditation data system should provide for the maintenance of definitions of common standards for the various options by program, and should allow the results of CTC reviews and recommendations to be entered in a structured and quantifiable way, where possible.

Site Visit (Year Six of the Cycle)

Site visits are conducted by the members of the accreditation team, whose aim is to determine whether and how well a Program Sponsor and its programs meet the common and program standards. The team builds a preliminary perspective by reviewing the Program Sponsor's Common Standards Response, the Sponsor's data analysis and the CTC staff's responses, and the program review and program summaries. The team also collects additional information, using stakeholder interviews and the review of materials, such as course syllabi, candidate records, or any other pertinent sources of information available.

The team then develops a consensus determination as to whether the Sponsor's education unit meets the common standards and whether each EPP meets each of the appropriate program standards. Based

on that determination, an accreditation recommendation with supporting documentation is submitted to the CTC's Committee on Accreditation (COA). The team's recommendation will be one of the following: Accreditation, Accreditation with Stipulations, Accreditation with Major Stipulations, Accreditation with Preliminary Stipulations, or Denial of Accreditation for the Sponsor and all of its credential programs.

The accreditation data system should allow the results of CTC reviews and recommendations to be entered in a structured and quantifiable way, where possible.

Follow Up (Year Seven of the Cycle)

Following the site visit and the accreditation team's recommendation, the Program Sponsor provides follow up information pertaining to the site visit findings and the COA's accreditation decision.

The accreditation data system should allow the results of CTC reviews and recommendations to be entered in a structured and quantifiable way, where possible.

Accreditation Team Management

CTC and PSD need tools to help manage a pool of volunteer accreditation reviewers. This section describes some of the relevant areas where such tools may be helpful.

The accreditation data system should allow the collection of volunteer details, including contact information, organizational affiliations, training history, areas of expertise, and availability.

Board of Institutional Reviewers (BIR)

The Board of Institutional Review (BIR) is a large group of K-12 and higher education educators, administrators and policymakers who are trained and assigned to work in pairs or small groups to review documents, interview stakeholders, and develop consensus decisions on the quality of EPPs. BIR members are selected based on the recommendation of a colleague, their knowledge of the Accreditation Framework, and a demonstration of the skill necessary to carry out a successful accreditation visit.

BIR Qualifications

BIR members are expected to meet a set of requirements covering professional experience and a variety of collaborative and analytical skills deemed essential for performing successful accreditation evaluations.

Tools for capturing the details of individual BIR members' unique qualifications, skills, and affiliations may be helpful in building accreditation teams.

Volunteer Training

BIR members are required to maintain a level of training sufficient to keep them prepared to serve on an accreditation team. There are rules surrounding the type of training required and there are time limits for lapses of service that may require brush-up training.

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Tools to help manage details of individual members' training and service dates will be helpful in managing and monitoring BIR training requirements.

Planning and Scheduling

PSD needs to plan and coordinate accreditation activities, considering the needs and availabilities of accreditation team members and the institutions whose programs are being reviewed.

User Interface Requirements

User Segments

Users may be grouped in three segments: Internal CTC users, External Sponsor Users, Public Users. CTC Internal Users may be further subdivided between CTC staff and BIR volunteers.

CTC internal users will be able to view all records from all sponsors, but may create and update only that data which is related to the evaluation of Sponsor provided data. Specifically, they may not alter or augment the data provided by the program sponsors. BIR volunteers should have access only to the reports submitted by program sponsors whose submissions they are reviewing, and may create and update records related to their reviewing activities.

Program Sponsor Users may create and edit records related to their programs and may upload supporting documents. They may view the results of CTC's review and respond to them, but they may not alter those results.

Public Users may view reports of accreditation status and aggregated statistics by program sponsor, including comparisons of data between two or more sponsors. The content visible to public users may be delivered via canned reports or dynamic dashboards.

Authentication and Security

CTC Internal Users and External Sponsor Users must be authenticated by person (no group-based logins). Public users need not log in to access available reports and dashboards.

The accreditation data system should allow audit tracking of database updates at least at the record level. i.e. who changed the record and when. For some critical data, auditing to the field level may be required.

Reporting/Dashboards

System reports may be developed using Crystal reports or other available reporting technologies. Dashboards may be developed using Tableau. Reports might include detailed accreditation documentation; summary reporting across, between, and within program sponsors and graphical representations of summary statistical data.

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Challenges

Nature of the Data

We expect much of the information supplied by program sponsors to be in the form of narrative descriptions, subjective observations, and institutional opinions. Such data are not easily standardized for efficient data storage, aggregation, or analysis. CTC seeks advice on structuring the data so as to maximize its usefulness after entry, including the use of techniques that incorporate quantitative data in both the sponsor submissions and CTC's evaluation of them.

Scalability

CTC anticipates that the scope and content of standards and reporting requirements will change over time. System data should be structured so that such changes do not require the re-design of the database, but rather may be accommodated by adding and/or updating records defining the standards and reporting requirements. Retention of historical data is required to ensure that data may be relied upon regardless of the standards in place at the time of submission.

Technology

For ease of integration with existing data systems, we anticipate building the database using SQL Server. The data will reside in its own schema, with an appropriate integration layer implemented to facilitate the delivery of data to internal and external users via reporting tools and dashboards. The technology to be use for developing and deploying the system front-end has not been selected. CTC seeks proposals that include recommendations and rationale for any proposed selection.